



## **MONTANA STATE HOSPITAL POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

### **INFORMING/COMMUNICATING CHANGES IN PATIENT'S CONDITION**

**Effective Date:** August 22, 2006

**Policy #:** PH-03

**Page 1 of 2**

**I. PURPOSE:** To keep family and responsible persons including legal guardians informed of a patient's medical or psychiatric condition while respecting the patient's right to confidentiality and privacy.

**II. POLICY:** Any significant change in a patient's medical or psychiatric condition will require notification of the appropriate person(s) after obtaining consent from the patient except in a situation where the patient has a court approved legal guardian.

**III. DEFINITIONS:** None

**IV. RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- A. The Social Worker assigned to the patient is responsible for obtaining consent or a refusal thereof, regarding the communication of a patient's change in psychiatric or medical condition to their family/ friends.
- B. The physicians have the ultimate responsibility for determining the changes in a patient's condition which need to be communicated to family/friends.

**V. PROCEDURE:**

- A. Every new patient admitted to the hospital without a legal guardian will be asked to grant or deny permission regarding communicating changes in their medical or psychiatric condition to the family or friends of their choice.
- B. If a patient's physical or psychological condition changes significantly, family members, responsible individuals, and/or the legal guardian will be notified.
  - 1. For medical conditions, the primary care physician routinely caring for the patient will in consultation with the social worker determine what individuals should be notified and inform those individuals of the patient's condition.
  - 2. If the change in condition is not of a serious nature, the primary care physician may designate a member of the treatment team to relay the information to the family. The primary care physician has to be available to answer any questions, if so desired by the family.

## Montana State Hospital Policy and Procedure

### INFORMING/COMMUNICATING CHANGES IN PTS CONDITION

Page 2 of 2

3. If the primary care physician is not available, the attending psychiatrist will determine what the physical condition is and relay this information to the family. If there is a team member who has worked with the family and knows the family better than the psychiatrist, the psychiatrist may designate that person to make the phone call to the family.
4. For significant changes in the psychiatric condition, the attending psychiatrist or a designee is responsible for communicating in consultation with the Social Worker the information to the family/guardian.

**VI. REFERENCES:** None

**VII. COLLABORATED WITH:** Medical Staff, Social Work Discipline Chief

**VIII. RESCISSIONS:** #PH-03, *Informing/Communicating Changes in Patient's Condition* dated December 18, 2002; #PH-03, *Informing/Communicating Changes in Patient's Condition* dated February 14, 2000 and HOPP #96-ADM-R, *Informing/Communicating Changes in Patient's Condition*, dated September 1996.

**IX. DISTRIBUTION:** All hospital policy manuals.

**X. REVIEW AND REISSUE DATE:** August 2009

**XI. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY:** Medical Director

**XII. ATTACHMENTS:** None

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Ed Amberg  
Hospital Administrator      Date

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Thomas Gray, MD  
Medical Director      Date